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ABSTRACT

It is the contention of the authors that most committees are frustrating to their members because of the lack of committeeship skills on the part of administrators. Committeeship skills are the administrative processes, skills, and techniques required to accomplish a desired task. This paper furnishes guidelines for determining whether to form a committee and for ensuring successful committee operations and provides a checklist for administrators to use in assessing their committeeship skills. (Author/IRT)

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A PROCESS FOR COMMITTEESHIP

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by

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At most levels within most organizations, there are countless hours consumed in committees. It is the contention of the authors that most committees are frustrating to the members because of the lack of committeeship, the administrative processes, skills, and techniques required to accomplish a desired task. The purpose of this article is to furnish guidelines for, 1) whether or not to even form a committee, 2) ensuring successful committee operations, and 3) providing a checklist for administrators to practice committeeship.

TO COMMITTEE OR NOT TO COMMITTEE

The first consideration for the administrator is to determine whether or not a committee is the best procedure to accomplish the task at hand. In making this judgment, the first question the administrator must ask is whether or not s/he already has a final decision or product in mind. If so, don't committee. People resent spending valuable time and energy producing the inevitable. A rule of thumb for the administrator is to ask if s/he is willing to accept the final product or decision of the committee as defined in the charge. If not, the committee is not the best means to accomplish the task at hand.

A second consideration is to ask whether or not enough time and/or expertise is available to allow the committee to function

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sucessfully. It is a faulty assumption that group decisions are necessarily "better" than individual decisions, especially if time is a variable, If expertise is lacking, the blind leading the blind rarely results in worthwhile decisions. It might be that committee members need to take more time and acquire expertise as the committee functions. Again, if time and/or expertise is a constraint, another process might be warranted.

TO COMMITTEE SUCCESSFULLY

Once the decision to committee has been decided, the purpose of the committee needs to be stated to effectively arrive at the size and representation on the committee. The composition and size of committee membership is usually based on one or all of the following reasons:

1) To have a representative group.
2) To develop a sense of ownership.
3) To share expertise and knowledge.

Forming the Committee

Each of the above reasons is valid, providing administrative processes are used in setting up the committee. It is, however, a faulty assumption that people assigned to represent others, in fact actually do so. Representation requires that the committee person solicit views and report back to those represented. Unfortunately, in many cases, the committee member represents no more than his/her own personal views and makes little effort to gather input from others.

Another faulty assumption is that being on a committee assures ownership for the final product or decision. The degree of ownership is directly proportional to the degree it affects the person's responsibilities on a daily basis and his vested interests. Therefore committee members should be composed of those with the greatest interest in the completion of the task.

In addition to interest, the people assigned should have the knowledge, energy, and time required to accomplish the task. A problem, however, is that the most energetic and knowledgeable members of the organization serve on too many committees. It is important that committee assignments do not either overburden or overlook specific members of the system.

Instructing the Chairperson

Once the committee has been formed, the most critical administrative function is to give specific charges to the chairperson. Often much time is wasted in electing a chairperson and more energy and time is wasted setting up the purposes, etc. All this should be accomplished prior to the first meeting.

The administrator should appoint the chairperson and charge that person with the responsibility of managing the committee. The specific information provided to the chairperson is:

1) The purpose and goal
2) The timeline for completion of the task.
3) The resources available: people, money, time, etc.
4) The form of the committee final product and/or evidence of task completion.
5) The date of administrative acceptance of the committee's effort to achieve closure.

Committee Functions

At the first meeting the chairperson reviews the goals, timeline for tasks completion, criteria for final product, closure date, and decides with the group the best time, day, and location to thold meetings, and establishes a schedule. It is important the the chairperson establish ground rules as to the responsibilities and commitments necessary for a successful effort. At this time, committee members who cannot accept or function within the constraints be given the option to resign from the committee.

A suggested ground rule is that any person absent from two consecutive meetings without cause be removed from the committee and a new member appointed. Another possible ground rule is when members represent other groups that they show evidence that they are, in fact, doing so. Such evidence might include:

1) Letter of progress to group represented with copy to the chairperson.
2) A log of efforts in soliciting and furnishing data.
3) Oral reports to the chairperson.

A suggested format for the final product is provided below:

1) Purpose.
2) Research efforts.
3) Alternates identified.
4) Selection of an alternative or combinations.
5) Reason(s) why it was chosen over the others.

Closure

A major morale factor in committee work is the absence of closure, a formal termination of the committee. It is critical that the administrator report back to the committee members the final decision or reaction to the committee efforts. Likewise, it is imperative that committee members report back to any groups represented.

Administrator's Checklist

The following checklist is provided to serve as a guide for administrators in committeeship skills.

AN ADMINISTRATOR CHECKLIST FOR COMMITTEESHIP

COMMITTEE/NO COMMITTEE		
A. Do I have a final decision/product in mind?	Yes	No
B. Am I willing to accept the final product/ decision of the committee?	Yes	No
C. Is adequate expertise available for the task?	Yes	No
D. Is time a constraint?	Yes	No

WHY FORM A COMMITTEE		
A. To make a decision?	Yes	No
B. To make a recommendation?	Yes	No
C. To produce a product?	Yes	No
D. To gather data for others?	Yes	No
E. To serve as a governing body?	Yes	No

REPRESENTATION ON THE COMMITTEE		
A. Do I want representative groups?	Yes	No
B. Is there a need to develop a sense of ownership?	Yes	No
C. Is there adequate expertise and knowledge available?	Yes	No

INSTRUCTIONS TO CHAIRPERSON		
A. Have I furnished the purpose in writing, and Is it understood?	Yes	No
B. Did I provide a timeline for task completion?	Yes	No
C. Did I delineate resources available?	Yes	No
D. Were criteria for the final product provided?	Yes	No
E. Was a closure date established?	Yes	No

SUMMARY

The committee is the major vehicle used in organizations to involve others in the decision-making process. The lack of committeeship skills at the administrative level can result in ineffective and inefficient use of personnel time. This article identifies those critical tasks and functions of committeeship necessary to have committees serve the organization.